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AN ARTIST'S END.
Lux in Tenebris Lucet

There are days, especially in November, so dark, damp, and gloomy that even to those endowed with a good constitution, life becomes a thing of utter weariness.

Ever since Kamionka had begun to feel ill and left off working at his statue of charity this same weather had oppressed him more than his physical ailment. Morning after morning he rose from his couch, wiped the large studio window and peered anxiously out to see whether there was any change in the weather; but the same dreary vista met his eyes. A leaden mist shrouded the earth; it did not rain, yet the flags in the court yard were covered with a greasy moisture, everything was soaked

with wet, and the large drops falling from the waterspout seemed to beat time to the slowly dragging hours of sadness.

The window of the studio looked upon the yard and garden beyond. The grass across the railings still looked green with the sickly greenness of death and decay; the trees were stripped of all but a few yellow leaves and the black, dripping branches seen dimly through the mist presented a ghost-like appearance. The rooks which had chosen them for their winter quarters flapped their wings and cawed loudly before settling down among the branches.

On days like these the studio looked like a mortuary. Marble and plaster of Paris require light and sunny skies. In the dim light their whiteness looked mournful, and the darker terra albas losing all distinctness of outline, took indescribable, almost hideous shapes. Dirt and untidiness added not a little to

the desolation of the place. Dust mixed with bits of clay, and dirt carried in from the street covered the floor. The walls, discolored by age, were bare except for a few casts of hands and feet; not far from the window hung a small looking-glass surmounted by a horse's skull, and a bunch of withered flowers.

In one corner stood the bed covered with an old, crumpled counterpane, near it a little table with an iron candlestick. Kamionka, to save expense, lived and slept in the studio. The bed was usually concealed by a screen; but now the screen had been removed so that the sick man might be able to watch the window opposite for the sun to come out. There was another still larger window in the roof, but this was so encrusted with dust and dirt that even on bright days it emitted but a scanty light.

It did not clear up. After several days of gloominess the clouds sunk lower yet;

the air became more and more saturated with mist and it grew darker still. The artist who had lain down on his bed fully dressed began to feel worse; he took off his clothes and got up no more.

He did not suffer from any particular disease; he only felt very tired, very sad, and a general weakness seemed to numb his limbs. He did not wish for death, yet could not summon energy enough to live.

The long hours of darkness seemed to him all the longer, as he had nobody near him. His wife had died twenty years before; his relations lived in another part of the country and he had no friends. His acquaintances had gradually deserted him because of his increasing ill temper. At the beginning people had smiled at his cantankerous humors, but when he became more and more of an oddity and took offence at the slightest joke, even those that knew him best broke off all intercourse.

They also resented that he had grown pious with advancing years and doubted his sincerity. Malicious tongues whispered that he went to church in order to get commissions from the priests. They were wrong. His piety was not, perhaps, the outcome of a firm and deep-rooted conviction, but it was genuine. The only thing said against him founded upon truth was his ever increasing miserliness. For many years he had lived in his studio upon the scantiest of fares, which undermined his constitution and gave his face the waxlike hue.

He avoided people, fearing they might want something from him. His was a warped nature, embittered and very unhappy. But for all this his character was not a common one, as even his faults had an artistic stamp. Those who fancied he hoarded money were wrong. Kamionka was a poor man because he spent all his money upon etchings, of which he had a

large collection. He looked at them now and then and counted them with the greed of a miser gloating over his gold. He kept this a secret from everybody, perhaps for the very reason that the fancy had sprung from a great sorrow and deep feelings.

A year or two after the death of his wife he had come across an old etching, the center figure of which recalled to him the features of his dead wife. He bought the print and ever afterwards looked about to find the same likeness in others and gradually, as the fancy got hold of him, he bought anything in the same line that pleased his artistic eye.

People who have lost what they held most precious in life are obliged to fill up the void, otherwise they could not exist. As to Kamionka nobody would have thought that this elderly egoist had once loved a woman more than his life. Had she not died, his life most likely would

have been different, more peaceful, and human. As it was this love had outlived his talent, youth and happier times.

The piety which gradually became a regular custom, based upon the observation of outward forms, had sprung from the same source. Kamionka was not one of those who clung to religious beliefs; he began to pray after the death of his wife because it seemed to him that this was the only thing now he could do for her, the only link which connected him with her. Natures apparently cold and impassive are often endowed with an intensity of feeling little suspected by their surroundings. After the death of his wife all Kamionka's thoughts twined around her memory and drew nourishment from it like the parasite plant from the tree to which it clings; but the human mind cannot subsist on this kind of nutriment; it distorts it and throws it off its balance.

Had he not been an artist he could not have survived his loss: his art saved him. It is useless to tell the survivor that it matters nothing to the dead in what grave they rest. Kamionka wished his dead wife to have the best he could give her and he worked at her monument as much with his heart as hands. This saved him from madness and prevented his giving way altogether.

The man remained warped and unhappy, but art had saved the artist. Henceforth Kamionka lived only for his art.

Very few in looking at pictures or sculptures give any thought as to whether the artist has treated his subject honestly or otherwise. Upon this point Kamionka was without reproach. He was not a genius, and his gift only a little above the average, therefore it could not fill his whole life or compensate him for his loss, but such as it was he respected it deeply

and was always true to it. During all his life he never insulted or wronged his art, either for fame, lucre, or blame. He created what he felt. In those happy times when he lived like other men he used to speak about art in quite an uncommon way and when afterwards people began to avoid him he thought of it in the loneliness of his studio with the same reverence and honesty.

Human beings in relation to each other have certain unwritten laws in virtue of which the exceptionally unhappy ones are condemned to solitude. It is the stone thrust out of the riverbed, ceasing to rub against other stones, becomes incrustated with moss, so the human unit separated from his fellows acquires faults and oddities.

Now when Kamionka lay ill nobody came to see him except the charwoman, who looked in twice a day to fill his samovar and prepare the tea. She ad-

vised to send for the doctor, but he scouted the idea, being afraid of the expense.

At last he grew very faint, perhaps because he took no nourishment except tea. But he had no desire for anything, either to eat or to work, or to live. His thoughts were as limp as the autumn leaves he saw through the window, and in harmony with the mist and darkness outside. There are no worse moments in human existence than when it is brought home to us that all has been done there was to do, and that life can give us nothing more. Kamionka for nearly fifteen years had lived in continual terror lest his talent should give out. Now he was sure of it and he thought with bitterness that even his art had deserted him. He felt weary and utterly exhausted. He did not expect to die soon, but did not believe he could get better.

Altogether there was not a spark of hope in him.

If he wished for anything it were for the sun to come out and shine through the window. He thought that might revive him a little. He had always been sensitive to the changes of weather, and rain or darkness always influenced his spirit, and now this hopeless weather, as he called it, had come when he lay prostrated on his bed.

Every morning when the woman came with his tea Kamionka asked:

"How does it look outside? Do you think it is clearing up?"

"Ah, no," answered the woman, "there is such a mist that one cannot see anybody within a yard."

The sick man hearing this shut his eyes wearily and remained motionless for hours.

In the courtyard everything was silent but for the slow continual drip of the waterspout.

At three o'clock in the afternoon it

grew so dark that Kamionka had to light the candle. This, being so weak, cost him no little trouble. Before stretching out his hand for the matches he thought it over, then raised his arm, the thinness of which showing through the night dress offended his artistic taste; after he had lit the candle, he fell back again, and remained motionless, listening with closed eyes to the monotonous drip of the water, until the charwoman came in for the second time.

The studio presented a strange sight. The flame of the candle lit up the bed and the artist lying upon it, and concentrated itself in one luminous point on the forehead, which looked like old polished ivory. The remainder of the room lay in deep shadow, which increased and thickened gradually. But in proportion as the darkness increased the statues seemed to grow more lifelike. The flame of the candle rose and fell, and in the

flickering lights they too seemed to move and stand on tip-toe to look at the emaciated frame of the sculptor, curious to know whether their creator were still among the living.

And truly there was in that face a certain rigidity of death. But from time to time the pale lips moved as if in prayer, or maybe silently complained of his loneliness, and the everlasting drip from the waterspout, which always with the same precision, seemed to measure the time of his illness.

One evening the charwoman came in smelling strongly of alcohol, therefore more than usually loquacious, and said:

"There is so much work on my hands that I can only just manage to look in twice a day. Why not send for a sister of mercy? They do not cost anything, and it would be more comfortable for you."

The idea pleased Kamionka, but like

most queer tempered people, he liked to oppose what anybody advised him, he therefore refused.

After the woman had gone he began to turn it over in his mind. A sister of mercy! It was true they did not take money and what help and comfort she would have been to him! Kamionka, like other sick people left to themselves, had to bear various discomforts and small miseries which hurt him as much as they irritated him. Sometimes his head was lying in an uncomfortable position for hours and he could not summon energy enough to rearrange the pillows; then at nights he often felt chilly and would have given anything for some hot tea, but if the lighting of the candle caused him difficulty how could he think of boiling the water? A sister of mercy would do all that for him with the utmost cheerfulness. How much easier it would be to bear illness with somebody to help him.

The poor man worked himself up to that extent that it appeared to him even illness under such conditions were something almost desirable and wondered inwardly that all this lay within his reach.

The thought also that if the sister came the studio would look more cheerful, even the clouds might lift and the unceasing drip of the waterspout cease to haunt him.

Then he began to regret that he had not agreed at once to the woman's proposal. The long, gloomy night was before him and he could not see her till next morning. It dawned upon him that this night of all others would be the longest and the heaviest to bear.

Thoughts flitted through his brain of what an utter outcast he was and he began to compare his former life with what it now was. And as the thought of the sister, so now the days past and gone, seemed to be closely allied with sunshine and bright skies.

He began thinking of his dead wife and to pour out all his grief and sorrow to her as he always did when he felt very miserable. At last he grew tired and fell asleep.

The candle on the little table burned down. The flame changed from pink into a bluish hue, then flickered up once and twice and went out. The studio was now wrapped up in utter darkness.

In the meantime outdoors the drops of water fell one by one as if all the sadness and gloom were filtering slowly through nature's bosom.

Kamionka slept long and peacefully, when suddenly he woke up under the impression that something unusual was taking place in the studio. It was towards daybreak. The marble statues and plaster of paris casts began to whiten. A pale light shone through the window opposite. By this light Kamionka saw somebody sitting near his bed.

He opened his eyes very wide and looked. It was a sister of mercy.

She sat quite motionless, a little turned towards the window, with her head bent down. Her hands were crossed on her knees—she seemed to pray. The sick man could not see her face, but he saw distinctly the white coif and the dark outline of the somewhat thin shoulders.

His heart began to beat a little anxiously and the question rose in his mind:

“When could the charwoman have fetched the sister, and how did she come in?”

Presently he thought it must be the fancy of a weakened brain and he shut his eyes. After a few moments he opened them again.

The sister was still sitting in the same place, motionless as if absorbed in prayers.

A strange feeling, partly of joy and

partly of fear made his hair rise. Something incomprehensible seemed to draw him towards that silent figure. He fancied to have seen her before—but where and when he could not remember. He felt a great longing to see the face hidden under the white coif. Kamionka, without understanding it himself, dared neither move or speak; he scarcely dared to breathe. He only felt that fear and joy possessed his whole being and asked himself wonderingly: What does it mean?

It had grown quite light now. What a wonderful morning it must be outdoors he thought. Suddenly, without any transition, a great flood of light came in through the window, a light as strong and radiant as comes in the month of May. Waves of golden sunshine seemed to pour in and fill the room, the statues and marbles disappeared within, the very walls seemed absorbed by it—and Ka-

mionka found himself in a lighted endless space.

He looked at the sister, the white coif, which concealed her features, seemed to shake with a sudden tremor, and the glorious light touched the bent head.

She turned it slowly towards the sick man and suddenly the deserted outcast saw as in a glory the well-known features of his beloved wife.

He rose from his bed, and from his breast came a cry, which spoke of years of bitterness, tears, and sorrow:

“Lozia! Lozia!”

And taking hold of her he pressed her to his heart and she threw both arms around his neck.

The light grew stronger and stronger.

“You remained true to me,” she said at last, “therefore I came and prayed that death might deal gently by you.”

Kamionka was still holding her in his arms for fear the holy vision might dis-

appear together with the light. "I am ready to die," he said, "if only I could keep you with me."

A smile of exceeding sweetness lit up her face and taking one hand from around his neck she pointed down and said:

"You are dead; look there!"

Kamionka's eyes followed the direction of her hand and there below, under his feet, he looked through the skylight into the dim lonely studio; there on the bed lay his body, the wide-open mouth forming a decavity on the yellow waxen face. He looked upon the emaciated form as upon a strange thing. He soon lost sight of it altogether, because the wave of light, as if moved by a breeze from other worlds, carried them higher and higher into space.